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Garrison Foes Claim Neglect

Need for Change Cited by 3 Seeking Post

The seven-year administration of District Attorney Jim Garrison came under attack Thursday from the three men seeking his post, all of whom charged Garrison with neglecting crime in the streets by pursuing his presidential assassination case.

The attack came during a luncheon before the board and membership of the Metropolitan Crime Commission of New Orleans.

Present were four candidates for the district attorney's post in the upcoming November election—Harry Connick, Ross T. Scaccia, Charles R. Ward and Garrison, who arrived an hour late for the luncheon at The Church House, 330 St. Charles st.

Presiding at the affair was Aaron M. Kohn, the commission's managing director, who became embroiled in an argument with Ward during the proceedings and wound up calling Ward a "convincing, sincere liar."

NEED FOR CHANGE

Activities got under way with 10-minute speeches by Connick, Scaccia and Ward. Though the words were different, the tone of all three was clear: there was much need for change in the district attorney's office. And the Clay Shaw conspiracy case instituted by Garrison was cited as a key reason for that change.

Though he did not hear his opponents initial remarks because of his tardiness, Garrison told the gathering that he had made significant improvements in the DA's office since he took over in 1962. He maintained that the office now has a higher level of professionalism than ever before and vowed to follow the same practices as before, if reelected.

"I see no reason to change," he stated.

Garrison also remarked that his investigation into the assassination of President John F. Kennedy would continue, although in modified form. He said it would eventually be proven that Kennedy was killed by agents of the Central Intelligence Agency.

The Ward-Kohn confrontation came near the end of the almost three-hour box luncheon. It began after Kohn asked Ward to comment on remarks made after Kohn had testified last year before the Orleans Parish Grand Jury about organized crime in the city. Kohn said Ward, as the then assistant district attorney, had been quoted as saying Kohn had presented "no evidence" to the jury.

BECOMES ANGRY

After Ward took the microphone and began to answer, he became angry when Kohn interrupted him, promising to leave unless he were allowed to answer without interruption.

"I won't sit here and listen to a false statement," Kohn retorted.

Ward then maintained that at least 36 persons on the Grand Jury had not been impressed by Kohn's statements to the jury and had decided not to return indictments. (Kohn was later indicted by the jury on grounds he failed to give his sources of information about organized crime.)

Ward then linked Kohn and Garrison together and described them as being "cut from the same cloth."

"They hate each other. But they have something in common. They are both obsessed. Garrison thinks there's a conspirator in every bush. Kohn finds the Mafia under every rock," Ward stated.

It was after this that Kohn took over the microphone and called Ward the "most convincing, sincere liar" he had ever met.

CALLED LIAR

Irate, Ward approached Kohn and maintained he had gone too far in calling him a liar. Ward said he had never called Kohn a liar in public and asserted Kohn was misusing his position on the crime commission.

Earlier in the luncheon, Ward had attacked Garrison for misusing his office. He said the DA had used the office for his own benefit rather than for the benefit of the people of New Orleans.

He accused Garrison of building an entourage of 13 investigators, two cars, two chauffeurs and two bodyguards.

Ward also said Garrison uses one car during the day and one in the evening "with only infrequent stops at the district attorney's office."

He charged that two of Garrison's investigators moonlight during the day as security officers for the New Orleans Saints football team, while another works as a nighttime bartender in Jefferson Parish and another as a parttime route man for a juke box-pinball machine company.

Connick charged Garrison failed to prosecute bail bond forfeitures, leading to uncollected forfeitures of more than $1 million and the release of more than 800 dangerous criminals.

He said a survey of bond forfeitures conducted by him for the period 1967-69 showed about 880 defendants that were not prosecuted and are now fugitives.

Said Connick, "That is a tremendous army of crime turned loose on New Orleans."

QUIT IN DISGUST

Scaccia said that he had resigned from the DA's office after four years as an assistant because of disgust over the Shaw conspiracy case, in which Garrison claimed Shaw plotted to kill President Kennedy. (Shaw was found innocent in a jury trial earlier this year.)

"It was a fabricated case, completely made up by the present DA for purposes of national publicity," said Scaccia.

The former assistant said Garrison has misused his office to prosecute people he does not like. As a result, the entire process of law enforcement and justice has been badly impaired, Scaccia said.

Garrison maintained that he had been conducting crusades against loan sharking and prostitution since he has been in office. He said that in more than 900 jury cases, his staff has won more than 800 and has never lost a murder case.

The district attorney denied there had been an agreement to relax law enforcement along Bourbon st. and to allow entertainers to sit with the customers.

Garrison said he did not think any improvements were needed in his office. "If there were, I would make them," he stated.

Asked if he could be defeated in the upcoming election, Garrison said, "Any official can be beat if he takes the office for granted." Garrison said he believed his popularity is about the same as it was when he was first elected to the post.